

Who Supports What? – A Study of Attitudes Towards Social Justice

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Social Justice forms an integral part of who we are as a society. The conception of justice, the *preferred* conception of justice, to which we ascribe demonstrates to the outside world the values and norms which we hold.

Social Justice is a contentious concept in political science and social policy; it is a very subjective and non-universal concept. The idea of an outcome or action being 'just' is a constant in every understanding of social justice; however what 'just' actually is depends on the individual's views and beliefs. In reference to the idea of social justice, Spragens, Jr (1993: 193) remarks that "we cannot seem to live without the idea but we cannot live comfortably with it either".

With the term 'social justice' meaning different things to different individuals, there exist many diverse principles to account for personal preference. The content of these principles vary greatly; from individualism to collectivism, from pure equality to the creation and acceptance of vast inequality.

The aim of this study is to take these diverse principles of social justice and examine how they fair in the 'real world' (at least in a UK context) and to see who supports them; a further dimension will be to look at the role that social class plays in the supporting of certain principles. "The absence of an explicit conception of social justice in political life has the result that arguments about public policy are made without any attempt to explain them from the ground up" (Barry, 2005: 10); as a result of carrying out class-based public attitude analysis it is the intention of this study to explain if and why different social groups support different principles of social justice.

This study will take these conclusions and compare them with the principles of social justice that appear to be promoted by government policy; policy which is, according to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton MP; "based on a belief in an active welfare state that balances rights with responsibilities, that provides work for those who can, support for those who can't"¹.

¹ Part of a speech by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton MP, on 24/01/06, to House of Commons outlining the government's green paper: 'A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work'

In order to facilitate an effective exercise in comparison, the Welfare-to-Work strategy, possessing the three elements of redistribution, benefits, and unemployment, will be used as the example of government policy and data from public surveys will be used to discover public attitudes to these three elements.

The aforementioned aims of this dissertation can be translated into three research questions:

- I. Are public attitudes to redistributive principles mirrored in Government policy?
- II. To what extent does Class affect public attitudes to redistribution?
- III. If there is significant divergence between the public and Government policy, how does this affect government legitimacy?

Why redistribute?

Esping-Anderson (2005: 7) states that ‘the welfare state implies a social contract with the citizenry’ and that ‘we must be certain that any design for a new social contract conforms to prevailing normative definitions of social justice’. The election of a Labour government in 1997 brought with it many changes to the redistributive welfare system and thus it is important to ensure that these changes are in line with public thinking.

The need for Government and public uniformity of attitudes with regard to social justice is demonstrated by Green (2005: 266): “members of society are thought to share common economic, political and social systems, such that one might consider ones society’s system apart from those of other societies”. As a result of the subjective nature of social justice and the lack of universally accepted concepts of justice; there is a heightened need for consensus on a micro level.

Steffen Mau (2004: 1) poses the relevant question; ‘why do people support welfare state institutions that pool social risks and redistribute resources between social groups?’. In answer to his own question three potential explanations are given: self-interest, public-spirited, or reciprocity. The idea of self-interest as a motivating factor presents the idea that support for the welfare state and its policies are not solely limited to the poor; this presents a rather individualistic view of social justice promoting many of the ideas that leave the welfare system open to abuse. By this it is meant there exist ‘perverse incentives’ which encourage individuals to

claim benefits rather than seek employment; it occurs because individuals are seen as ‘rational calculators’ who seek to maximise their own gains with little regard for others (Mau, 2004: 55). This issue can be seen to be somewhat addressed in Labour’s Welfare-to-Work strategy with the use of stringent eligibility conditions.

‘Public-spirited’, according to Mau, can be seen to represent a collectivist approach to redistributive social justice, one which resists the divisive nature of the economic model: a somewhat equality-based altruistic conception of social justice. This moral approach can be seen to be advanced by the wide appeal of the welfare state; ‘the larger the number of groups who benefit from the welfare state in some tangible and salient way...the less likely [it] is that people will come to oppose government intervention to reduce inequalities (Kluegel and Miyano, 1995: 87). This exercise of moral policy, through the weaving of the welfare state into the fabric of the citizen’s life, was believed to enrich a citizen’s participation in society; “people’s moral horizons will broaden and they will be willing to contribute to the collective good” (Mau, 2004: 53).

The concept of reciprocity fits in somewhere between the individualist view of self-interest and the collectivism of public-spirit. Following this path, it can be said that public attitudes are based around what individuals think is fair in terms of the distribution of benefits to some and expenses to others – this is an issue which will be examined when looking at social class-based public attitudes. For example, is the distribution of benefits equal to the distribution of costs? Something which MacCormack (1976: 90) refers to as “acceptance of an object places the person who receives it under an obligation to make a return at some future time”. In the welfare state context, this means that those who accept benefits at one point should later be the ones contributing to the costs of such. Essentially those who receive benefits are given them on a conditional basis with the expectation of this being time-limited, as shown in the UK Government’s welfare-to-work strategy of moving people off benefits and into work.

Corneo and Gruner (2000: 1491) suggest that attitudes to redistributive social justice are heavily influenced by status and an individual’s social justice preferences are designed around ‘status maintenance’, for the well-off, and ‘status aspiration’ in the case of lower-income individuals; “while the middle class may obtain economic benefits from a large amount of redistributive taxation, it may oppose an equalisation of living standards since this would harm its social status. The fear of losing social status in favour of the poor induces the middle class to enter a political alliance with the rich which supports conservative taxation programs”.

The role of the middle class in the welfare state can be seen to be predominantly self-interested from the point of maintaining their societal advantage. However as Le Grand (1982: 137) notes, the welfare state benefits the better off as a matter of course; “public expenditure on the social services has not achieved equality in any of its interpretations. Public expenditure on health care, education, housing and transport systematically favours the better off and thereby contributes to inequality in final income”. The welfare state provides the middle class with the goods and services that they could freely afford anyway, but this subsidisation of the middle class is necessary for the operation of the welfare state. However, as later chapters will show, this does not mean the middle classes are completely opposed to social redistribution.

Whilst the middle classes may unduly benefit from the redistributive actions of the welfare state, a Rawlsian conception of social justice would still suggest that these inequalities are ‘just’ as the worst-off are in an improved condition under the welfare state compared to if the welfare state did not exist. The welfare state and the targeted redistribution that it brings “leads to an optimum degree of economic inequality which is less than that which would pertain if one accepted the maximization of utility as the criterion of optimality” (Gordon, 1973: 275)

Chapter 2 – Principles of Social Justice

What is Social Justice?

As outlined in the introduction, social justice forms an integral part of who we are as a society and as David Millar (2001: 1) suggests, this concept represents “how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society”. The conception of justice, the *preferred* conception of justice, to which we ascribe demonstrates to the outside world the values and norms which we hold. Social justice, representing these values, is responsible for the way citizens interact with each other and with government; forming the corrective mechanisms to reduce the differences between the well-off and their poorer counterparts; “the UK need not be a tired, resentful, divided, failing country” (Commission for Social Justice, 1994: 17).

There are numerous ways in which these differences can be solved – or at least attempted – and these each depend on the conception of social justice employed; each having different perceptions of what is ‘just’ and ‘unjust’. It is these differing perceptions that dictate how and why public policy does what it does; the outcomes of policy depend on their intentions and these in turn depend on the nature of social justice as an “operative, policy-guiding ideal, an ideal with political relevance rather than an empty phrase” (Millar, 2001: 2). For example, every intelligent body knows that the existence of poverty is one of mankind’s greatest failings, but how we go about rectifying this is open to debate. Does redistributing wealth to those in poverty, in an attempt to reduce the extent of poverty, pose unjust consequences of those who are sacrificing their wealth to in order to enable this? Is this, therefore, ‘just’ or ‘unjust’? In the later analysis of Government policy it will be examined to what extent such policy deals with poverty reduction; “the first prerequisite for eradicating poverty is the redistribution of income and wealth from rich to poor” (Brown and Cook, 1983: 20)

Each of the different principles of social justice outlined in this chapter demonstrates the different ways in which they approach these questions; and at the same time show the extent to which they differ. It can be seen that the aims and motivations behind redistribution in an egalitarian sense are greatly different from a Nozickian entitlement conception of social justice. These motivations can be seen to be influenced, it will be argued, by self-interest and this is a point which will be expanded upon later.

“Is it that inequality is wrong or only that poverty is bad....what obligations, if any, the rich have towards the poor (either domestically or internationally), at any rate as long as the rich did not come by their wealth by manifestly illegitimate means such as theft or extortion. To answer questions like these we need a theory – a theory of social justice” (Barry, 2005: 4)

Principles of Social Justice (*and their critiques*)

Because this dissertation is dealing primarily with attitudes rather than theoretical philosophy, the range of social justice principles to be used for measurement and comparison has been reduced accordingly. The three principles of social justice to be used in this study are: Equality, Entitlement, and Desert. Operationalisation of these key principles will be outlined in the following chapter.

Egalitarianism: ‘Equality’

Egalitarianism is the theory of the principle of equality; that all individuals should be treated the same and as a result there should be no inequalities. It is a simple enough ideal but the problems arise when deciding what the definition of ‘equality’ should be based on? Income? Happiness? Welfare? Resources? Opportunity? These are all options given by egalitarian scholars and thus, this diversity, presents the practical difficulty which egalitarianism faces. Equality of welfare, that is individual wellbeing, “fails to distinguish between expensive tastes which people are simply landed with and expensive tastes that they have deliberately cultivated” (Dworkin, 2000: 288). Thus egalitarianism does not take into account individualism and individual choice. Similarly, equality of resources, that is giving everyone the same amount of resources to do as they wish in a free market, also leads to inequalities: the ‘group of the talented’ (Walzer, 1983: 14) are more skilled at making the most of their share than others thus creating equality of outcome. Equality of opportunity presents the same problem of a more, through the luck of birth, skilled class in society. Such inequalities created by the pursuit of egalitarian values would “require continual state intervention to break up or constrain incipient monopolies and to repress new forms of dominance” (Walzer, 1983: 15); this leads to the state becoming the dominant monopoly.

Dworkin (1981: 285) defines equality as the envy free distribution of resources in that “no division of resources is an equal division, if once the division is complete, [an individual] would

prefer someone else's bundle of resources to his own bundle". Yet as personal wants and desires are so individualistic, it is impossible for everyone to be truly satisfied. Egalitarianism "tends to divert attention from considerations of greater moral importance than equality" (Frankfurt, 1987: 23) by concentrating solely on achieving equality, it fails to account for individual needs. Using a medical example, an individual may need more medicine than they are allocated as their equal share to survive; egalitarian thought would dictate that it would be unfair on the other members of society if they had to give up some of their share to meet the needs of this individual.

True equality also fails to take into account different peoples skills and potential. It is difficult to say, and most people would agree, that "not all inequalities are unjust" (McLachlan, 2005: 2) McLachlan illustrates this point with the example of a qualified doctor and a medical student, the majority of people would not be unwelcoming of the doctor being paid more than the medical student. It is the nature of our meritocratic class-based society that we allow income and wealth to be desert-based; "surely no one every intended a strict equality in all income and wealth?" (Philips, 1999: 46). However, whilst desert-based principles allow for unlimited inequalities, in practice there is a moral attempt to keep the scale of these differences under control.

'Entitlement'

Entitlement can be understood in different ways: 'Entitlement' theory is a set of 3 principles and they are the only principles of social justice here that specifically call redistribution 'unjust'; Nozick's (1974: 151) view is that "the complete principle of distributive justice would say simply that a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings they possess under the distribution". Nozick's principles of justice in transfer and justice in acquisition deal with the issue of ownership of resources. These principles allow for unlimited inequalities as Nozickian social justice defines 'justice' as distribution by legitimate means; even if this leads to wide societal differences; "a just distribution is one that well-informed people create for themselves by individual choices, provided that the economic system and the distribution of wealth in the community in which these choices were made are themselves just" (Dworkin, 2000: 313). Entitlement theory is a historical principle and therefore decisions are made on the basis of what has happened rather than in the current period. Therefore unjust distributions, as a result of fraud or theft, can be rectified by the principle of justice of rectification of injustice; Kymlicka (2002:

120) refers to this situation as the ability to “acquire absolute rights over a disproportionate share of the world”.

These libertarian ideals regard attempts to achieve equality by rectifying unequal circumstances as “oppressive social intervention, central planning, and even human engineering” (Kymlicka, 2002: 154), with Nozick comparing taxation to forced slavery. It is argued that this leads libertarians and supporters of entitlement to fail to account for peoples differing capacities for choice and abilities. It can be contested that this theory represents ‘status-maintenance’ leading to the better-off in society remaining better-off and the less-well off remaining as the subject of inequalities.

Entitlement can also be seen as a principle in its own right and be taken to mean the provision of rights and resources outlined by law. This varies from Nozick’s entitlement ‘theory’ as it conceivably support redistribution as long as those who benefit meet certain conditions, dictated through such mechanisms as means-testing or qualifying criteria. It is in this regard that there can be seen to be a blurring of the distinction between this principle and the principle of ‘desert’.

‘Desert’

“Is support owed to those who cannot find work they think is fulfilling?” (Dworkin, 2000: 321)

This conception of social justice is based on what people are judged to deserve based on their actions; ‘a just distribution of resources, in other words, simply is one in which each party gets what he or she deserves’ (Millar, 2001: 132). The principle of desert and its relationship with institutions is a contested one; is desert derived from the institutions of society? i.e. socially constructed norms or is it independent of them? Desert can be seen to be different from merit on the basis that desert has a moral basis. For example, if an individual is employed in a dangerous vocation, then merit would imply that s/he would be receive a higher reward than some other, less dangerous, profession however “if someone carries out a hazardous rescue, then discloses that he did it only in the hope of being rewarded by his grateful victim, we may revise downwards our estimate of what he deserves” (Millar, 2001: 134). On this basis, motive can be seen as an influencing factor in desert claims. Yet desert claims can be seen to be ineffective when dealing with luck or chance, are people truly deserving of reward if the outcome occurred as a result of

good fortune? For example surely it is wrong to say that someone who has purchased a lottery ticket probably deserves the prize? (Goodin, 1985: 584)

The problem with ‘desert’ is that it is a subjective concept and this is skilfully illustrated in an example by Harsanyi (1975: 596): “Consider a society consisting of one doctor and two patients, both of them critically ill with pneumonia. Their only chance to recover is to be treated by an antibiotic, but the amount available suffices only to treat one of the two patients. Of these two patients, individual A is a basically healthy person, apart from his present attack of pneumonia. On the other hand, individual B is a terminal cancer victim but, even so, the antibiotic could prolong his life by several months”. In this case, who would be the most deserving? Both would die without treatment.

Do you make the decision who to treat on past actions? (Individual A has prominent role in the community) or on future actions? (Individual B could make a medical breakthrough that could save thousands of lives in the final months of his life)

In the context of welfare, the principle of desert – despite being viewed as ‘commonsense’ (Lamont, 1994: 1) – is challenged by the principle of need. The challenge of need is a complex one; how should those individuals who are ‘undeserving’ be treated in relation to their needs? For example, there are two patients awaiting a liver transplant: one is a middle-aged alcoholic scientist (A) and one is a father with a young family (B). The patient with the young family does not require the transplant as urgently as the alcoholic, yet there is a significant chance that the alcoholic will continue to drink himself to death. Who should be given the transplant? Most would agree that, on the basis of desert, individual A should be given it as he has dependants and an expected long life expectancy; however on the basis of need, individual B would most likely die if forced to wait longer. In this case, it would be clear that “needs trump desert” (Goodin, 1985: 586)

Different principles

These different principles deal with the issue of redistributive social justice in many different ways and have different agendas. Each conception of social justice listed above favours a different group – the principles of ‘Entitlement’ theory are largely geared to the status maintenance of the better-off whilst egalitarianism is detrimental to the better-off as it involves

taking resources away from them – and therefore it is likely that different principles can be seen in the separate social classes.

The existence of different principles also has a profound impact on the direction of public policy; in particular those policy areas that deal largely with redistributive justice. The influence of social justice principles on government policy raises questions of political legitimacy and class favouritism. As there are a plethora of different social justice principles, there can be envisaged a situation where the social justice principles found in government policy do not match, and may in fact be the polar opposite, the principles held by the public. In this case there would be cause for concern on grounds of the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the public.

It is also the aim of this study to uncover the consequences of class-based social justice principles – which groups benefit and which groups suffer as a result – and how this translates into inclusive public policy.

Chapter 2 – Research Methodology and Aims

Research Questions

- IV. Are public attitudes to redistributive principles mirrored in Government policy?
- V. To what extent does Class affect public attitudes to redistribution?
- VI. If there is significant divergence between the public and Government policy, how does this affect government legitimacy?

This dissertation will examine the role of redistribution of wealth and income in British government policy and in the mindsets of the British public. The main aspect of this study would be to identify any differences or similarities between the two sources of Government and Citizen. This is an interesting topic as it studies the relationship between the voting public and their elected representatives, and identifies whether the latter really represents the former.

The issue of whether the government actually represents the views and values of the people is an important one as it proposes the question of government legitimacy. How can the government legitimately claim to be ‘of the people’ when their views are not represented?

The identification of difference principles of social justice and theories behind the formation of attitudes will enable these research questions to be answered. Similarly public attitudes may be influenced by factors such as self-interest, status maintenance, and altruism. These concepts will be developed in later chapters and used as indicators to try to explain the data gathered by secondary analysis.

Research Methods

Surveys and studies conducted in the area of attitudes aim to be representative of the general population, but that is all they can be. I wish to further this by adding another dimension to the study of citizen attitudes: the issue of social class. I wish to examine, to what extent, the issue of social class causes divergence from the ‘mean’ survey results and their trends. In an example, whether high-income households are less supportive of redistributive principles of justice; and

vice versa. Social Class, in the context of this study, is taken to be based on Income². It is the hypothesis that an individuals' social class plays an important role in which social justice principle(s) they support.

Operationalisation of social justice principles

The different principle(s) of social justice held by each social class will be examined, in the belief that higher social classes may hold a more entitlement-based concept of social justice when compared to the working class who may hold a more equality-based conception. But in order to determine which principles each social class prefers it is necessary to develop indicators to identify each of the principles; Equality, Entitlement, and Desert.

Broad outline of the type of support for these principles:

- 1) **Equality:** every individual should be given access to the same resources with little or no visible distinction between social classes
- 2) **Entitlement:** individuals should be given access to resources based their entitlement for them i.e. through qualifying conditions and means-testing
- 3) **Desert:** individuals should be given access to resources because they 'deserve' them. In a social justice context this can be seen as an example of 'rights with responsibility'

Key indicators have been identified and include:

➤ Attitudes towards redistribution of income as a whole

- 1) Individuals who support the principle of equality will generally be supportive of such redistribution in an attempt to reduce the inequalities between individuals.
- 2) Individuals who support the principle of entitlement will be less supportive of redistribution as this involves penalising the rich, something seen as 'unjust' by Nozick but will soften as long as certain conditions are met.

² The author acknowledges that this conception of social class, like the issue of social justice, is subjective and open to debate.

- 3) Support for the principle of desert will be found where redistribution is accepted as long as it is targeted at the most deserving and needy.

➤ Attitudes towards redistribution to create or maintain state benefits

- 1) Individuals who support the principle of equality will support equalising measures to reduce the income gap between rich and poor individuals
- 2) Individuals who support entitlement will require qualifying criteria and conditions for benefits so that only those who are entitled to them are accessing them
- 3) Individuals who support desert will be seen to be supportive of benefits as long as it goes to those who are most deserving. It is conceivable that extra benefits for those who deserve it may also be given over and above the basic level. There may also be seen to be a cross-over with entitlement with the existence of support for qualifying conditions as a safety measure against fraud.

➤ Attitudes towards levels of state benefit

- 1) Supporters of the equality principle would be seen to favour generous state benefits that have the most impact of equalising income
- 2) Entitlement supporters will be wary of having levels of benefit set too high as this would make the receipt of benefits a more favourable option. Supporters of this principle would be seen to favour a level of benefit that encourages individuals receiving it to attempt to re-enter the labour market or improve their employment prospects
- 3) Desert principle supporters would be seen to favour extra benefits, as a reward, to those who are attempting to achieve the same aims outlined above.

In order to carry out this research and comparison, both government policy and public attitudes will be analysed. As the focus of the study is on public attitudes, it has been decided that the study of government policy will be carried out first; this will provide an effective backdrop to the comparison and study of public attitudes.

Government policy outputs will be taken to mean policies from the post-1997 Labour administration in the areas of tax and benefits. Any extension from these areas may be unduly influenced by institutional factors such as welfare structure and conservative legacy.

On this level, it will be examined to what extent there are similarities between the policy outputs of Government in the field of income and redistribution and the attitudes of the public (and the variations in class). This will enable it to be seen whether the policies of government are representative of the people – and to what percentage of the people; for example the higher social classes may be disadvantaged compared to the middle and working classes.

An examination of all Government policy would be impossible given the constraints of this dissertation. For the purposes of comparison with public attitudes, the policy areas with most redistributive capabilities will be examined: namely the benefits system and the tax system in the form of the Welfare to Work strategy.

Government policy will be assessed in terms of legislation and policy programs of the New Deal and Tax Credit elements of the Welfare-to-Work strategy. It is noted that policy-makers may wish to support redistributive policies yet institutional veto-players and influences may affect the outcomes; these points will be considered and accounted for. It may also be seen that more than one principle is seen in Government policy; for example, many benefits may be seen being aimed at ‘equality’ whilst the means-testing element of benefits may be seen to represent ‘entitlement’ – though the two together may be seen to represent ‘fairness’ aimed at stopping abuses of the system.

Data to enable a study of government policy attitudes will be taken from relevant government publications and statistics. These will largely be taken from the Department for Work and Pensions as this is the department responsible for the areas under study. These areas will be examined in terms of their redistributive potential and support for social justice. Government policy and public attitudes will be set against the different social justice principles, outlined in chapter 2, and analysed to determine the extent to which they favour one principle over another.

The examination of public attitudes through social class and social justice principles will take place through analysis of data from 4 major surveys

- British Social Attitudes Survey
- Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

- With additional commentary from the European Values Survey and the European Social Survey

The data from the BSAS and SSAS will take a longitudinal approach and examine trends from 1997 (the election of the Labour government) to 2003 (the latest released data). By conducting a longitudinal study, any changes in attitudes can be identified and attempts to explain such changes can be given.

Indicator data on public attitudes will then be compared to the corresponding indicator results from an examination of government policy. Similarly public attitudes may be influenced by factors such as self-interest, status maintenance, and altruism. These concepts will be developed in later chapters and used as indicators to try to explain the data gathered by secondary analysis.

As the data used has been gathered from published survey datasets, the ethical issues surrounding the data are reduced. Issues regarding data collection, including consent and questionnaire design will have been resolved during the conduction of primary survey. As the data is now being re-used for analysis in this dissertation, it would have been preferable to seek consent from the original respondents for their information to be used, as per British Sociological Association guidelines, however due to the scale of this task, this was not possible. The reader can however be assured that no data has been altered or misinterpreted and has been retained in context.

Chapter 4 – Social Justice and New Labour

Since the election of 1997 New Labour have set about changing and replacing many of the policies of the previous Conservative administration. Originating on the left of the political spectrum, social justice has never been far from the forefront of Labour policy, however, after more than a decade in opposition, by 1997 there had been some softening of their leftist position; “the shift of the Labour party away from its traditional base among the urban working class appears to be gaining momentum” (Beackon, 1976: 231).

This shift was the result of attempts to attract disaffected conservative supporters to the party. The conservative reign of power had brought about an individualistic society, favouring the better-off members of society; demonstrating Nozick’s ‘Entitlement’ conception in its full glory. The favouring of the private sector had created wide class divisions with private (read: better) health care, education, and opportunities only available to those who could afford it. The number of citizens of working age in employment in 1996 stood at just under 72% and by 2005, this reached 75% meaning “the employment level now stands at 28.798 million and is at a record high since comparable records began in 1971” (ONS, 2005: 467) after rising consistently over Labour’s period in office.

The broad egalitarian perception of social justice held by New Labour led to greater, equalising, investment in health, education, social services and the establishment of a National Minimum Wage. Evidence of the party’s commitment to redistributive social justice can be seen in the increasing resources being allocated to these services which are the mainstay for those without private provision.

“It (New Labour) has put more resources into mainstream schooling and further and higher education to maintain the momentum towards improved life chances. It has financed generous increases in benefits and tax credits especially for families with children to tackle child poverty directly. Most of the mainstream public services, and especially the NHS, have seen handsome increases in resources”

(Reed and Robinson, 2005: 282)

In the cases of the National Health Service and Education provision, there is no targeting of specific social groups in policy in terms of investment. However, as a result of demographics, it is the working and middle classes who benefit most from such increased investment.

Whilst such cases demonstrate a conception of redistributive social justice aimed at reducing societal inequalities without specification, increasingly welfare policies are coming with conditions attached. Thus reflecting an entitlement-desert based conception of social justice; “Individuals are encouraged to take the opportunities offered to them by the Government and if they fail to do so, they become, in effect, responsible for their own inequality” (Franklin, 2000: 139). Opportunities such as the Education Maintenance Allowance³ are means-tested to benefit the worse-off, and therefore most deserving of assistance, students; whilst Individual Learning Accounts in Scotland (the scheme of the same name was discontinued south of the border due to fraud) contribute up to £200⁴ to the costs of training/education schemes. Similarly the many voluntary New Deal schemes represent opportunities for a citizen to reduce their inequalities, but they have to take up these opportunities in order to do so. These policies and opportunities represent a redistribution of resources from those better-off to those, allocated by prerequisites, which are more deserving and face inequalities of opportunity.

The move from a largely egalitarian ‘old’ labour view of redistributive social justice to a more mixed conception, consisting of elements of egalitarianism, entitlement, and desert, can be seen in the shift to the central political ground and with new support for ‘rights with responsibilities’. The conceptual reshuffle has seen the ideal of ‘full employment’ change to ‘equality of opportunity; demonstrated by the move from ‘welfare to work’. Work for those who can and increased support for those who can’t; ‘Since 1997, we have begun to transform the welfare state from the passive one-size-fits-all inheritance to an active service that tailors help to the individual and enables people to acquire the skills and confidence to move from welfare to work’⁵.

The pursuit of the principle of ‘equality of opportunity’ poses many potential dilemmas for government; this principle can be understood as “in any political community all citizens must have an equal opportunity to do what they wish to do or have by their own actions; and conversely not to have or do what they do not wish” (Green, 1988: 5). In reality achieving full

³ which can pay up to £30 per week to students from poorer backgrounds to stay in education after the age of 16

⁴ £200 if individual is earning less than £15,000 pa. or is on benefits, else it is £100

⁵ Speech by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Alan Johnson, to the IPPR on 07/02/05

equality of opportunity is an impossible goal, not everyone is born with equal capacities so rather it is more practical to aspire to maximize a persons' opportunity. A prime example of this can be seen in the New Deal programmes which cater not only for moving citizens off benefits into work but, where possible, into the area of work *they* want (see New Deal for Musicians). The financial costs of equality of opportunity can be seen to be one of the reasons behind the use of entitlement-based conditions for such inequality reducing government schemes; the goal of 'rights with responsibilities' does not come cheap as the Chancellor's vast increases in public spending and increasing budget deficit demonstrate.

The shift to 'equality of opportunity' and the re-engaging of those previously on benefits back into the labour market represent a marked change to the policy and ideology which the citizenry were used to under the conservative era of government. With such a change in policy, it is of interest to see whether this transformation is supported by the public and the subsequent questions that this raises. In order to do this, public survey data on this topic is to be compared and contrasted against the policy which represents this marked change in policy: the 'welfare to work' strategy.

Chapter 5 - Social Justice and Government Policy: Why Examine New Labour's Welfare-To-Work Strategy?

What is Welfare to Work?

The Welfare-to-Work strategy played a key role in the election of New Labour in 1997 and marked a significant shift from Conservative policy. The strategy consists of several points: central to the policy are the extensive New Deal schemes, tax credit – which provide a guaranteed ‘minimum income’ (Millar, 2000) – and social inclusion policies such as the National Child Care Strategy.

This strategy aimed to get individuals off benefits and into paid employment, “the Government believes that for those how can, work provides the best form of security and independence” (HM Treasury, 2005: 17). However in order to achieve this, there would be many problems to overcome; such as the unemployment trap, poverty trap, and childcare issues.

The unemployment trap exists when “the difference between in-work and out-of-work income is too small” (HM Treasury, 2005: 11); in essence there is little incentive for individuals to seek gainful employment as there would be, financially, little benefit to themselves. The scenario conveys a rather self-interested view of individuals.

Similarly the poverty trap demonstrates the dependency on benefits and the negative effects of tapering off of benefits; “the highest levels of poverty will be among group are marginal in the labour market” (Taylor-Gooby, 2001: 160). The conditions of state benefits require that they be reduced once individuals start to work a certain number of hours a week or reach a certain income level: this is referred to as ‘tapering off’. As such, it is argued that individuals have little incentive to increase the number of hours in which they work or seek promotion for fear of ‘tapering off’ because “it may leave them little better off [financially]” (HM Treasury, 2005: 11).

Childcare, or lack of, was seen as a hindrance to lone parents and low-income families re-entering the labour market. This was an issue can be seen to be addressed by the creation of several tax credits, especially the Children’s Tax Credit (2001-2003) and its successor, the Child Tax Credit.

Another factor in the 'Welfare-to-Work' strategy was the creation of Jobcentre Plus to deliver "work-focussed support for all those of working age on out-of-work benefits" (DWP, 2002: 24); an agency designed to facilitate work placements and training, under the *New Deal* scheme, and also to provide for those unable to work.

In order to counteract these problems, the Government devised a new system of tax credits – in order to "make work pay" (Bennett and Millar, 2005: 28) and introduced the New Deal family of programmes aimed at retraining and facilitating re-entry into the labour force.

Why examine Welfare to Work?

In order to compare the principles of redistributive social justice conveyed by Government policy outputs with public attitudes, it is necessary to select key policy areas. The study of the entire range of Government policy would be unfeasible with the time constraints and many areas would not be wholly relevant to the question of redistribution. As public attitudes are being examined on the basis of social class (income), it was felt that the policy areas to be studied should reflect different effects of the different social classes; "welfare to work has been focussed on people who are not employed but who are required to be available for, and seeking, employment as a condition of benefit receipt" (Bryson, 2003: 12). The concepts of tax credits and the New Deal schemes are prime examples of policy being tailored to specific social groups; as opposed to the universality of, for example, the National Health Service; "The 1997 and 2001 governments have targeted their new measures on families of working age, and in particular on low-waged workers...and the biggest gains have gone to families with children, single pensioners and low-waged families" (Taylor-Gooby, 2001: 160). The Welfare to Work strategy demonstrates a prime example of redistribution and exhibits the principles of equality of opportunity supported by New Labour.

In addition to this, the strategy represents both a financial example of redistributing wealth to those lower-income citizens, in the form of Tax Credits, and a redistribution of resources in the form of the New Deal programmes. The New Deal element could also be considered to be an example of long-term wealth redistribution, as the programme aims to increase an individual's employability and result in paid employment (earning a higher income than benefits); however

this programme would not exist without funding through taxation, which is paid at a higher rate by those in the higher-income bracket.

Tax Credits

Tax credits, representing the greatest reform of the tax system since the 1940s, shift the emphasis from out of work benefit payments to “a top-up through the pay packet” (HM Treasury, 2000a: 9). The new system aimed to reduce the effects of the unemployment trap by increasing the incentives to work by ‘making work pay’ (at least more than unemployment benefits). The policy of the Government is that paid employment is both economically and socially preferable to welfare.

Studies show that employment has a psychological effect of boosting well-being and dependence on the state on the part of the individual; “As a tax credit rather than a welfare benefit, it reduces the stigma associated with claiming in-work support, and by demonstrating the rewards of employment over welfare should encourage families to work” (HM Treasury, 2000a: 8) From the point of view of the state, moving individuals off welfare and into work brings the benefits of a larger workforce which is good for the economy; “the social security should operate in a proactive way that reconnects people with the world of work as quickly as possible; rather than trapping claimants in a dependency culture” (Page, 2003: 7)

Tax credits represent a major redistribution in resources towards the less well-off and it is for this reason that it provides a compelling case for comparison with social class attitudes.

New Deal programmes

The New Deal programmes represent the practical real-world face of the Welfare-to-Work strategy by providing the tools required to assist individuals to return to work. The grand scale of the programme – there are seven different New Deal schemes – represents the extent to which the Government values work over benefits. While Tax Credits focus on the financial incentives to return to the labour market, the New Deal focuses with the practicalities in the form of training opportunities and support from a personal advisor. The New Deal ideal can be seen as the perfect compliment to the Tax Credits as they seek to rectify the other form in which work disincentives take: lack of skills.

The compulsory nature of certain New Deal schemes can be a testament to the resolve of the New Labour 'employment first' ethos. These compulsory schemes largely cover younger people; this can be seen to represent the determination to break the cycle of long-term unemployment that many of these claimants will face in later life. Whilst the voluntary schemes, such as those for lone parents and those over 50 years of age, demonstrate the government's view that work should be available for those who can – equality of opportunity.

Both these aspects of the Welfare to Work strategy represent the New Labour governments' attitude to redistributive social justice as it is a strategy aimed at those who are disadvantaged over those who are better off. A more in-depth analysis of Tax Credits and New Deal programmes can be found in the following two chapters.

Chapter 6 – Tax Credits and Social Justice Principles

This chapter will outline the different Tax Credits, their aims, and their conditions of use. These aims and qualifying conditions will then be examined in relation to the different social justice principles outlined in chapter 2.

Tax Credits

These aim to “reduce stigma by switching from a benefit to an entitlement” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998: 1). The Tax Credits system is designed to help achieve New Labour’s aim of reconnecting rights and responsibilities; “any rights or entitlements to benefits had to be accompanied by responsibilities – especially to seek work or training” (BBC⁶, 2001). This was achieved by recognising the positive role employment can play in avoiding welfare dependency and ‘underclass’ status and to remove the ‘perverse incentives that encouraged cheating’ (BBC, 2001) that existed in the welfare state previously.

Introduced in April 2003, there are two different types of tax credit: Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. The Working Tax Credit is aimed at those aged 16 and over and working at least 16 hours per week (known as the ‘Basic Element’). This basic element has a maximum payment amount of £1,620. Additional payments⁷ are made to those:

- Who are lone parents or a couple (Maximum of £1,595 extra)
- Working more than 30 hours (Maximum of £660 extra)
- With a disability (Maximum of £2,165)
- With a severe disability (Maximum of £920)
- Over the age of 50 (Maximum of £1,110 if working between 16 and 29 hours per week or £1,660 if you’re working over 30 hours per week)
- With childcare costs (Maximum of £175 per week for one child, £300 if two or more)

These maximum payments are the result of means-testing and are dependant on such qualifiers as income, average number of hour’s worked and any other benefits that an individual may receive.

⁶ The use of the BBC as a source of policy information is used to represent the mass publicity that this policy has been given

⁷ These figures are based on the year 2005-2006, taken from HM Revenues and Customs Tax Credits Technical Manual, which can be accessed at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/tctmanual/index.htm>

This will “guarantee working families a minimum income, above and beyond the level of the minimum wage. It will encourage people from unemployment into work” (HM Treasury, 1998: 3).

The Working Tax Credit is used as a supplement to other benefits such as housing benefit and council tax benefit, though the amount an individual receives in tax credits can affect the amount of other benefits they can receive. For those entitled to Working Tax Credit the maximum amount payable is £5,220 per year; those with annual income at or below this threshold will receive the maximum award for the elements they are qualify for. Those with an income above the £5,220 limit will have their maximum award reduced by 37p for every pound of income above the limit⁸.

Child Tax Credit is paid to families both in work and out of work, this aims to provide a “stable source of income for families as they make the transition from welfare to work” (HM Treasury, 2000b: 31) and therefore removing the disincentive to work through monetary loss. The Child Tax Credit (which replaced the Children’s Tax Credit) is made up of four elements⁹ (and as with the Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit is the subject of means-testing):

- **Family element** – paid to all eligible families to recognise the responsibilities faced by families with children. (Children under one year can receive a maximum of £1,090 and a maximum of £545 from one year old and above)
- **Child element:** given for each child in the family (Maximum of £1,690)
- **Disabled child element** – for families caring for a child with a disability (Maximum of £3,975)
- **Severe disabled child element** – for families caring for a child with a severe disability (Maximum of £4,895)

Claimants entitled to Child Tax Credit have an upper limit of £13,910¹⁰; above this limit will see the tax credit reduced by 37p in every pound of extra income. However, the family element of the child tax credit is retained until income exceeds a limit of £50,000 per year¹¹. Once this limit is reached, the tax credit is reduced at a rate of £1 for every £15 over the limit.

⁸ The Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determinations of Rates) Regulations 2002, Reg. 3(2)

⁹ These figures are based on the year 2005-2006, taken from HM Revenues and Customs Tax Credits Technical Manual, which can be accessed at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/tctmanual/index.htm>

¹⁰ The Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determinations of Rates) Regulations 2002, Reg. 3(3)

¹¹ The Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determinations of Rates) Regulations 2002, Reg. 8(3)

The Child Tax Credit, in addition to promoting the return to employment, has also a moral aim to reduce child poverty both in the present and in adulthood; “child poverty denies equality of opportunity which can eventually blight adult life” (HM Treasury, 2004: 15), therefore the tax credit can be seen as a preventative measure to reduce welfare dependency in adulthood.

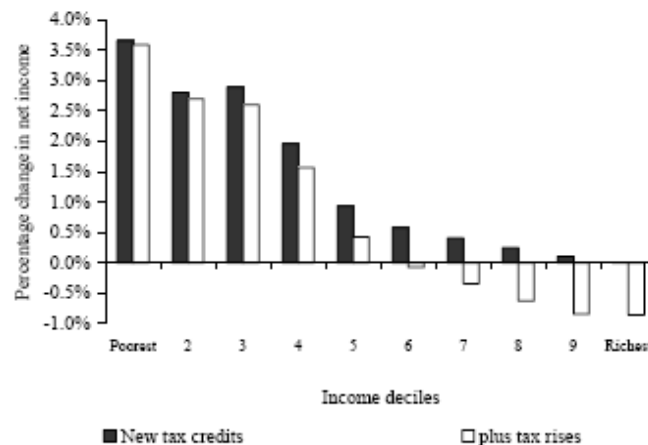


Figure 1: Distributional effects of the new tax credits introduced in 2003

(Adapted from Brewer, 2003: 10)

These tax credits and their concern for families on low incomes represents, according to Deakin and Parry (2000: 183) “Treasury-driven social policy” and are an example of ‘progressive universalism’; they ensure that whilst the vast majority of families benefit from tax credits in terms of income, the biggest increases in incomes can be seen in those with the greatest need, as shown in figure 1.

How social justice principles are reflected in Tax Credits

The Joseph Rowntree foundation describes the move to a tax credits system as “switching from a benefit to an entitlement” (JRF, 1998: 1). Viewing tax credits as Entitlement-based, in a theoretical context, can be seen to be contested in this case, as we have seen, Kymlicka, (2002: 154) remarks that libertarians regard attempts to achieve equality by rectifying unequal circumstances as “oppressive social intervention, central planning, and even human engineering”. If this is the case, then entitlement cannot be the principle behind tax credits as both the Working Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit contain elements to dealing with childcare costs and costs

associated with disabilities; therefore tax credits can be seen to “recognise particular aspects of disadvantage in the labour market” (HM Treasury, 2002: 33); more in keeping with an egalitarian conception of social justice.

Yet the egalitarian conception of social justice can be seen to be contested also; “the welfare state has been more about redistribution over the individual lifecycle than redistribution between rich and poor. By contrast, the new tax credits are, by and large, only paid to those on low incomes” (Bennett, 2003: 200). This can be seen to be correct due to the tapering-off of the tax credits once an income level has been reached, therefore making sure that idea of ‘progressive universalism’ prevails. This suggests that what is seen as achieving equality by some members of society could be interpreted as ‘social intervention’ by others as a result of constructing policy to favour a certain section of society, namely the lower income group; “fiscal reforms alone increased the net income of all the lower eight deciles with the highest gains for the poorest tenth” (Taylor-Gooby, 2001: 160). However “the state has a clear role in supporting and protecting children so that they do not suffer as a result of their parents’ circumstances” (HM Treasury, 2004: 16), this ‘social intervention’ could be seen as a moral interpretation of Nozick’s principle of justice of rectification of injustice.

However, the Working Tax Credit can be seen to demonstrate elements of the desert-based principle of social justice in the ‘30 hours element’ which aims to “provide incentives to increase hours towards full-time work” (HM Treasury, 2002: 33), essentially rewarding individuals for returning to work. Indeed the rhetoric behind tax credits frequently refer to the incentives to work and the rewards of work and therefore tax credits could be interpreted as a reward for leaving benefits.

Chapter 7 – The New Deal Programme and Social Justice Principles

This chapter will outline each component of the New Deal programme, an integral part of the welfare-to-work strategy which favours employment over benefits. In doing this the conditions and motivations will be examined and related to the social justice principles reported in chapter 2 and demonstrated with tax credits in the previous chapter.

The programmes

There are seven New Deal schemes as of 2005 and cover a wide range of circumstances, they are:

- New Deal for Young People (18-24)
- New Deal for 25 Plus
- New Deal for 50 Plus (Voluntary)
- New Deal for Disabled People (Voluntary)
- New Deal for Partners (Voluntary)
- New Deal for Musicians (Voluntary)

It is important to mention each of these ‘New Deal’ schemes as the diversity of their nature demonstrates the New Labour ideal of ‘equality of opportunity’, by enabling the many distinct and diverse groups in society to achieve their potential. The extent of this ideal can be seen in the New Deal for Musicians; it would have been easier to find employment out with the music industry (and in some cases, public opinion would have been more supportive of this).

When examining the New Deal strategy, it is worth noting that the only compulsory scheme is the NDYP and ‘25 Plus’, as this age group are the mainstay of the economy. However the many ‘secondary’ New Deal schemes are voluntary yet they cover a wide range of circumstances.

The New Deal programmes aimed at young people are divided into 2 schemes, for those aged 18-24 and for those aged 25 and over. These are available – or rather are compulsory – for those who have been claiming jobseekers allowance for a specific period of time; 6 months in the case for 18-24 year olds and 18 months for aged 25 and over. The scheme consists of a 4 month ‘gateway’ of “intensive period of weekly interviews and jobsearch support from a Personal Adviser” (DWP, 2005a: 4), following on from this ‘gateway’ stage there are 4 options for those who have failed to

gain employment; subsidised employment, self-employment, 6 months working in the voluntary sector, or 6 months working with the environmental task force. Also full-time education and training with the view to making the prospective employee more appealing to the labour market; “NDYP is not simply about getting young people into jobs but also about enhancing their employability”(Millar, 2000: 19).

The New Deal for Lone Parents is designed to help lone parents back into the workplace and also to support those working less than 16 hours per week. It focuses on the primary concern for lone parents, that of childcare. The scheme also helps to cover the cost of childcare. However, this scheme “embodies the view that the decision to work, or not, is a legitimate choice for such lone parents” (Hasluck, 2000: 13). It is for this reason that the NDLP is voluntary; an evaluation study of the NDLP scheme suggested that 9% of those offered the scheme refused for this reason (Lessof et al, 2003: 97).

The New Deal for 50 Plus was created because “people of all ages have a right to expect security and decent support when they are in need” (DWP, 2005b: 42) and is part of a strategy to “support people nearing retirement in making informed decisions for themselves about work, saving and retirement” (DWP, 2005b: 42). As well as catering for the long-term unemployed, the ND50+ also seeks to help those over 50 who wish to return to the labour market; this is done through a series of tools including training, work experience, and confidence building.

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It can be seen through New Deal for Disabled People that the definition of those who are ‘unable to work’ is changing with a more concerted effort to get people back into work. This is a voluntary scheme yet the policies and benefits for those who are disabled and unemployed are means-tested with stringent conditions and restrictions; NDDP is specifically targeted at claimants of Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowances “who want to work, but need some help and support along the way” (DWP, 2005c: 1). This is done with the aid of a job broker, an individual assigned to assist in matching persons capabilities with potential employers. It is easier to return to employment, if possible, than to claim benefits and as a result the numbers entering via the New Deal for Disabled People are recognisably high at 900,000 (ONS, 2003); this is synonymous with New Labour’s drive for full opportunity of employment.

The New Deal for Partners is aimed at partners of people claiming benefits. Similar to many of the other New Deal schemes it offers training, advice and support. This programme represents the

extent to which the Government aims to improve living standards for those on the lower end of the income scale “as it potentially offers another route for the household to start earning, by getting the (usually female) partner into work” (Saunders, 2005: 24). However this scheme may become redundant as the Government moves towards turning the partners into claimants themselves and therefore migrating to other New Deal programmes.

Finally the New Deal for Musicians represents an alternative to the NDYP and ND25 Plus as it is specifically designed for those who “already have some experience as a musician and can show a commitment to your chosen career” (DWP, 2005d: 1). It is aimed at those individuals who wish to pursue a career as an artist or instrumentalist rather than a career in the technical side. Whilst providing many of the benefits and facilities found in other New Deal schemes, the NDfM also provides industry professionals and expertise.

Relating social justice principles to the New Deal

As with Tax Credits, it can be seen that the New Deal programmes are constructed with the needs of lower-income groups in mind; with the compulsory programmes representing a concerted effort to move individuals off benefits and into employment. This demonstrates the seriousness of New Labour’s conviction in relation to the ‘rights with responsibilities’ policy.

Evidence of the ‘rights with responsibilities’ mantra can be seen in the penalties imposed on those individuals, in the compulsory schemes, who do not make an attempt to find employment rather than remain on benefits; “those who refuse to take any of these options may face benefit sanctions” (Webb, 2003: 26). This can be seen to highlight the principles of entitlement and desert. Desert can be seen by the rewarding – or continuation – of financial assistance for those either looking for work or embarking on training with a view to future employment. Entitlement can be viewed, in this context, in much the same way with only those actively pursuing re-employment eligible for benefits; Tony Blair, on becoming leader of the party remarked “it is wrong that we spend billions of pounds keeping able-bodied people idle and right that we spend it putting them to work to earn a living wage” (Blair, 1994).

However, focusing on the disadvantaged in society represents an egalitarian sense of social justice, in the form of Equality of Outcome; “the biggest gains have gone to families with children, single-pensioners and low-waged families” (Taylor-Gooby, 2001: 160). In 1997, the

New Labour government inherited an economy “where nearly one in five households containing working age adults had no-one in employment” (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2003: 32), through the New Deal, and increased work incentives, individuals have been able to create a better quality of level for themselves through increased income; which has been found in employment rather than benefits. Equality of Opportunity can be seen in the many voluntary schemes of the New Deal, by creating opportunities for retraining and expert guidance with a view to returning to the labour market. The New Deal for Musicians represents a prime example of tailoring a scheme to a specific group and gives the impression that the goal of New Labour social justice is not simply to get individuals off benefits and into employment, but to get them into the job that they aspire to enter (this example will be discuss further when examining public attitudes).

A bridge between Entitlement/Desert and Egalitarianism can be seen with the ND50+ scheme; between 1998 and 2002, 650,000 individuals over the age of 50 returned to work (Disney and Hawkes, 2003: 53). From this point of view it can be seen that Equality of Opportunity is the main principle of social justice behind the New Deal. However this is only half of the story, policy regarding disability benefits – often used by those too young for the state pension – had over this period been used to “toughen up the eligibility tests” (Disney and Hawkes, 2003: 63) and qualifying criteria, in line with the view of rights with responsibilities.

The mixing of social justice principles seen in both tax credits and the New Deal confirms Esping-Anderson’s (2005: 8) statement that “everyday politics usually represent a hodgepodge of principles of justice”.

Chapter 8 - Public Attitudes to Redistributive Social Justice – ‘Representative’

What the data says – on Redistribution

In assessing public attitudes to redistribution it is first necessary to determine whether, and to what extent, there is a recognised need for it. This may take the form of the majority of the public conceding and appreciating that unacceptable inequalities exist. Taking into account the background of the social class effect, it is worthwhile to analyse the survey data on a ‘representative sample’ basis initially. Once this has been completed, the true degree to which social class has an effect can be examined through the variation/ deviation from the ‘mean’.

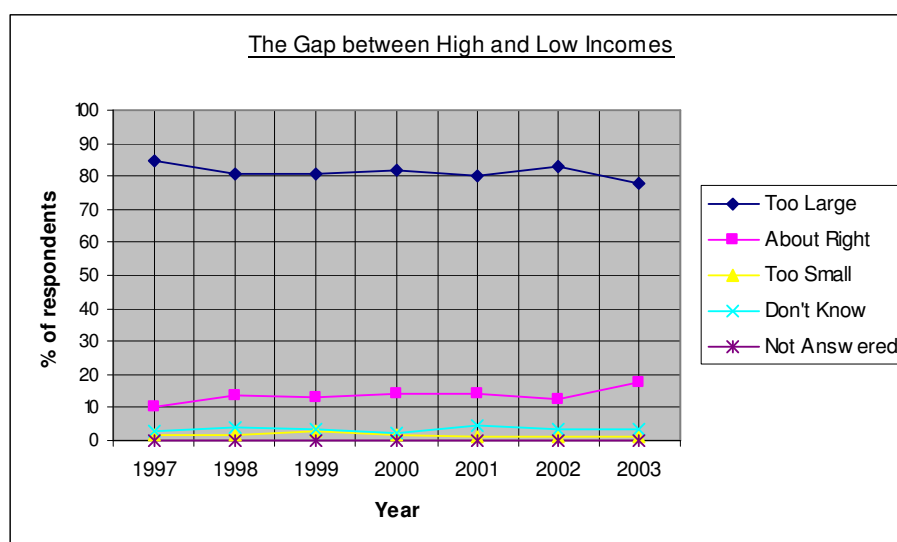


Figure 2: ‘The gap between high and low incomes’ (Data collected from BSA 1997-2003)

Data taken from the British Social Attitudes survey over the period from 1997 to 2003 shows that not only is there a recognised gap between the social classes but also that such an income gap is too large in size on the basis of respondents being asked the question “Thinking of income levels generally in Britain today, would you say that the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is:”. The data in figure 2 is used to demonstrate that over the course of New Labour’s governance such attitudes have remained largely constant; such a time span is used to demonstrate that this belief is not the result of popularism or sensationalism but a long held attitude of the British people. It can however be seen that since the beginning of the New Labour administration, the number of

respondents who believe that the gap is 'too large' has slightly fallen – 84.6% in 1997 to 77.8% in 2003 – whilst the numbers who believe that it is 'just right' have risen from 10.5% in 1997 to 17.6% in 2003.

The acknowledgement of such an income gap is one thing, whether the public feels it is just or unjust is another.

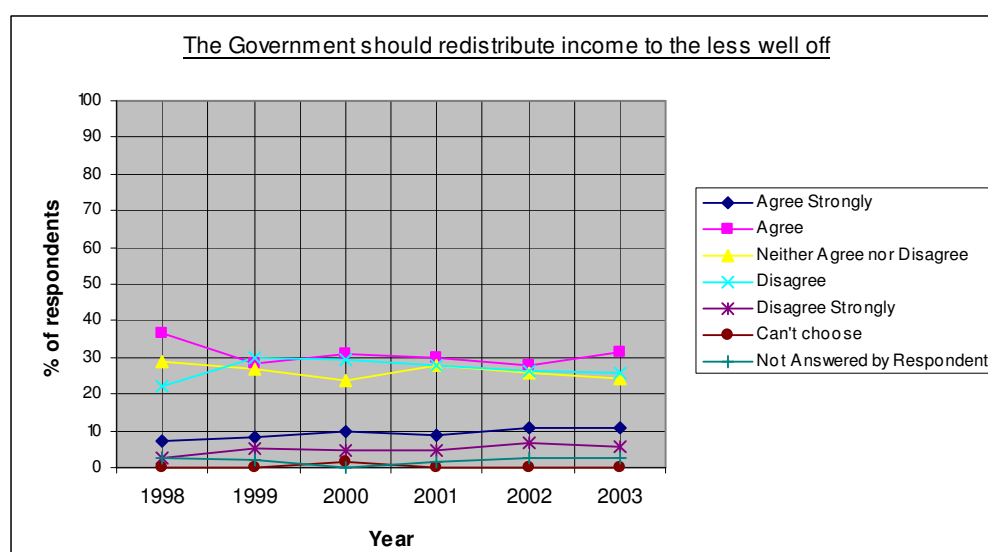


Figure 3: "The Government should redistribute to the less well off" (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

Data taken from the British Social Attitudes Survey over the period 1998 to 2003 shows that the attitude to the role of government to redistribution is subject to fluctuation; this may be the result of the self-interested nature referred to by Mau and that other, variable, factors may play a role such as the economy, family and employment, reflecting the 'status-maintenance' view of Corneo and Gruner. However it can still be seen that there is long term support for redistribution to the less well off with more respondents either 'agreeing' or 'agreeing strongly' rather than 'disagreeing' or 'disagreeing strongly' – 44% to 26.4% respectively in 1998 and 42.2% to 31.2% in 2003. Spragens Jr (1993: 206) remarks, in reference to this, "it is only fair and proper for society to cause this undeserved suffering to be shared more equitably by imposing some of its costs on the lucky ones".

In both figures 2 and 3 it can be seen that positive attitudes to redistribution decline slightly over the period to 2003, it could be concluded that this is in response to the effects of new government policy on redistribution taking an effect. This could also suggest that there is

only an extent to which, in practice, the public will support redistribution; in effect they support equality but not too much. This is a point which further study could determine.

What the data says – on Benefits

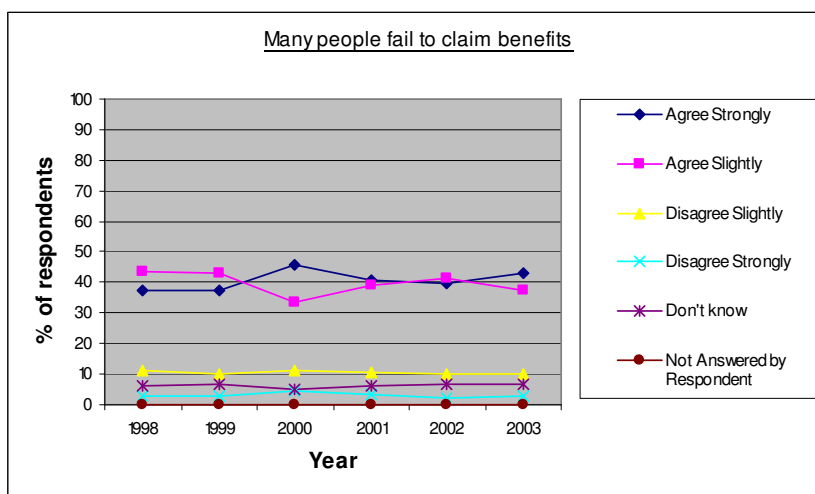


Figure 4: “Many people fail to claim benefits” (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

With the majority of individuals in favour of redistribution and the principle behind the concept, it is unsurprising that, in the light of such a rich-poor divide, individuals believe that not everyone who is entitled to benefits, actually claim them. Over the period 1998-2003, it can be seen that there is an increase in respondents who agree ‘strongly’ over those who agree ‘slightly’; this can be compared with the increase in the range and promotion of benefits and redistributive services provided by the government (Tax Credits being one of them).

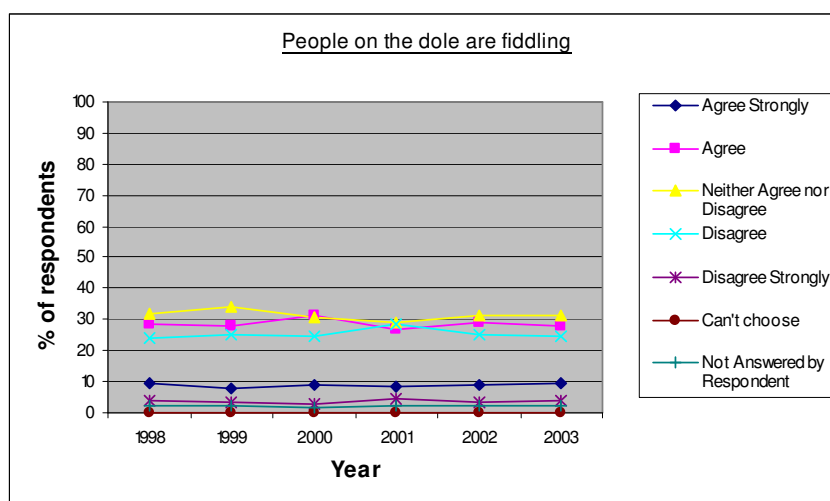


Figure 5: "People on the dole are fiddling" (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

Having identified the fact that the general public recognises there is a large income differential between the rich and poor and, as shown in figure 2, there is, on the whole, support for redistribution, attitudes towards benefits – the 'dole' – may be interpreted as surprising. Over 1/3 of respondents believe that those on benefits are fiddling and cheating; this contradicts figure 4 somewhat as previously respondents had suggested that not enough people claim the benefits that they are entitled to. Both figures 4 and 5 demonstrate the principles of entitlement and desert in that potentially those who are claiming benefits are deserving of them. In the 1999-2000 European Values Survey, 48.5% of respondents answered that they had 'not very much' confidence in the social security system compared to 31.3% who had 'quite a lot'. In support of figure 5, the same EVS survey, measuring on a 10-point scale¹², recorded a mean value of 1.99 when asked if it was ever justified to claim benefits that an individual was not entitled to.

¹² The value of '1' representing 'Never' and the value of '10' representing 'always'

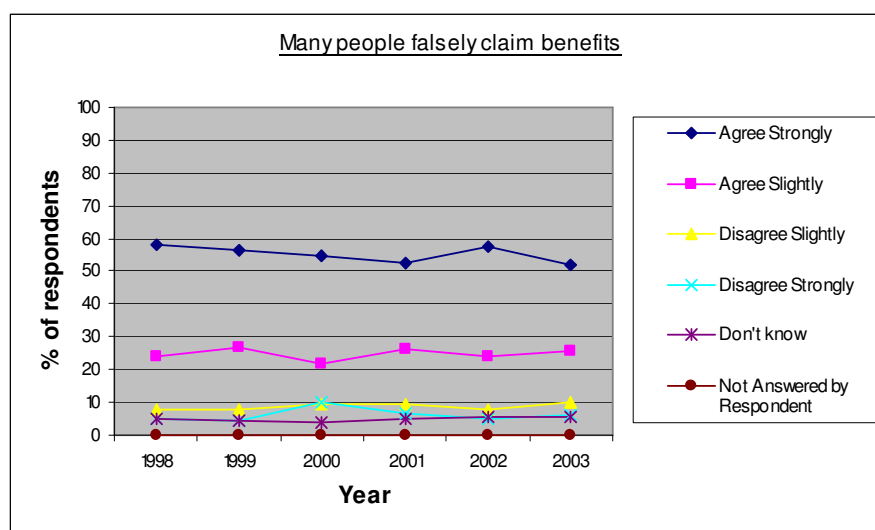


Figure 6: “Many people falsely claim benefits” (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

The fall in respondents who ‘agree strongly’ that many people falsely claim benefits can be taken in comparison to the increased use of means-testing and qualifying conditions introduced into the benefits system through government policy and an increased focus on fraud prevention.

What the data says – on Unemployment

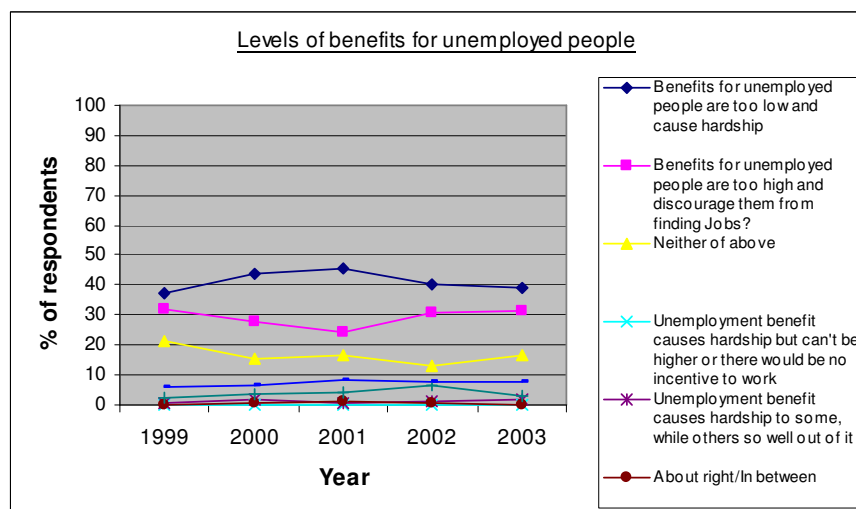


Figure 7: “Levels of benefits for unemployed people” (Data taken from SSAS 1999-2003)

Data from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey shows that over 1/3 of respondents believe that benefit levels are too low, this supports previous BSA data shown in figures 2 and 3 in

demonstrating the rich-poor divide. This can be compared with the new comprehensive system of tax credits and New Deal training schemes developed by the Labour government in order to reduce such a divide; a divide in which, according to the 2002-2003 European Social Survey data, 49.5% of respondents believed that the government should reduce.

Whilst it can be seen that there is a majority of respondents who believe that benefits are too low, the mistrust of those claiming benefits (see figures 5 and 6) may be attributed to the shift in government policy to more pro-active labour market policies aimed at returning individuals to the workplace. This can be seen in the UK context in the 'rights and responsibilities' mantra and the New Deal training schemes; however the 1999-2000 European Values Survey, on a 10 point scale¹³, respondents in the UK gave a mean value of 4.92; indicating that whilst they are not completely in favour of forcing the unemployed back into the labour market at the first opportunity, they are not total against it.

It is this point in which government policy and public attitudes differ in terms of their principles of social justice; the extensive New Deal programs provide a claimant-led service which some individuals may think is too accommodating. A case in point can be seen by returning (again) to the New Deal for Musicians; a programme for the unemployed specifically tailored to one group, giving them access to opportunities which may not be available to those in work. This may be seen as going against the entitlement and desert principles demonstrated by public attitudes but also not reflecting equality principles as this is a scheme only for the unemployed who fulfil certain criteria.

¹³ The value of '10' representing the response: 'People who are unemployed should have the right to refuse a job they do not want'. The value of '1' representing: 'People who are unemployed should have to take any job available to them'

Chapter 9 – Public Attitudes to Redistributive Social Justice – ‘Social Class’

As discussed previously, there exists a body of literature on the role of social class in redistributive social justice. A prominent point of contention when discussing social class and redistribution is the involvement of the well off members of society in the welfare state; a role that many argue is counterproductive and ideologically unsound. The welfare state was designed to benefit the worst off members of society, providing goods and services to those who could not afford private provision, such as education and health services. However, as a result of many aspects of the welfare state operating on the principle of universalism, it is often the case that the better off unduly benefit.

This benefit can be seen in terms of the provision of goods and services that they could readily afford themselves, and as a result of this, resources are diverted from those most deserving; “in egalitarian terms...the beneficial involvement of the non-poor in the welfare state is not merely wasteful – it is actually counterproductive. The more the non-poor benefit, the less redistributive (or, hence, egalitarian) the impact of the welfare state will be (Goodin and Le Grand, 1987: 215). This rational can be seen to be demonstrated in Director’s Law which supposes that the main beneficiaries of the welfare state are the members of the middle class; “public expenditures are made for the primary benefit of the middle classes, and financed with taxes which are borne in considerable part by the poor and rich” (Stigler, 1970: 1)

Such a value leads support to the theory of self-interest in the form of status maintenance, on behalf of the rich, and status aspiration on behalf of the poor. ‘Status maintenance’ is demonstrated by Corneo and Gruner (2000: 1491); “the fear of losing social status in favour of the poor induces the middle class to enter a political alliance with the rich which supports conservative taxation programs”. Hochschild (1979: 480) demonstrates the belief of ‘status aspiration’ in that “the poor in particular might favour redistribution both because their absolute need is greater and because the rich have more efficient ways to get richer”, who also suggests that social psychology exposes individuals to compare themselves with others and, in the case of the less well off, produces an envious response.

Empirical data should therefore be examined to test these ideas of maintenance and aspiration with the hypotheses that high and middle income individuals will reflect individualistic principles of social justice with lower redistribution, such as entitlement or desert; whilst the less well off

should be seen to more vigorously support principle of redistributive social justice that favour equalisation.

What the data says – on Redistribution (broken down by social class)

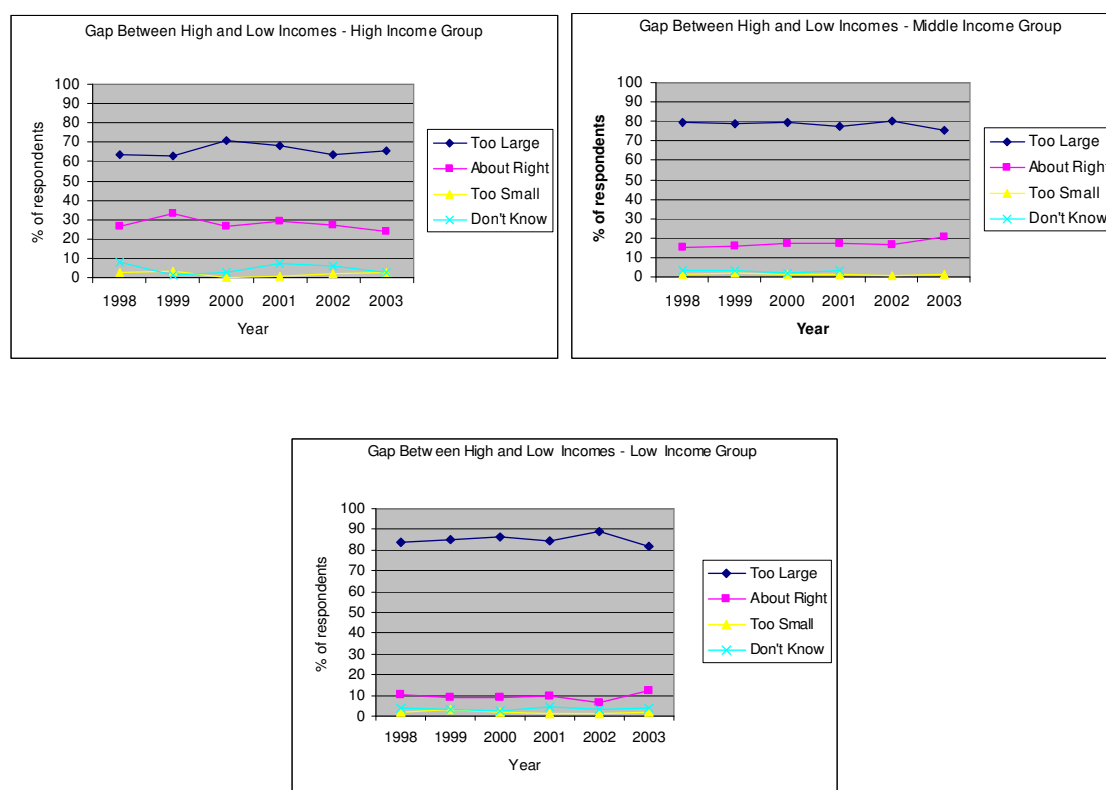


Figure 8: “The gap between high and low incomes” (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

Attitudes toward the gap between high and low incomes can be seen to vary depending on social class. Of the view that such a gap is ‘too large’, clear differences can be seen with support for this opinion rising from between 60-70% in the high income respondent category to between 80-90% in the low income group; conversely those who believe that the gap is ‘about right’ predominately belonging to the high income group. Noteworthy support (20%) for the existence of a rich/poor divide amongst the high income group of respondents reducing to 10% amongst the low income group, as demonstrated in figure 8, validates the theory of ‘status maintenance’; with those individuals being less willing to redistribute to those less well off for fear of sacrificing their own status and lifestyle. (A lifestyle that will be out of reach of most individuals who belong to the low income group). However the significant support, > 60%, for the view that the income gap is too large lends some credence to Mau’s ‘public-spirited’ explanation, It can be seen that, over the

period 1997-2003, exposure to the redistributive policy introduced by the Labour government has had an effect of influencing attitudes. The ‘Middle’ and ‘Low’ income groups, who have benefited most, have seen a net rise in the belief that the gap is ‘about right’; it could be conferred that this is a result of the equalising measures that both groups have experienced. Whilst the high income group may have, as a result of public exposure to the plight of the lower status groups, moved slightly to a more central ideological standpoint, rejecting the individualist approach of conservatism and Thatcherism.

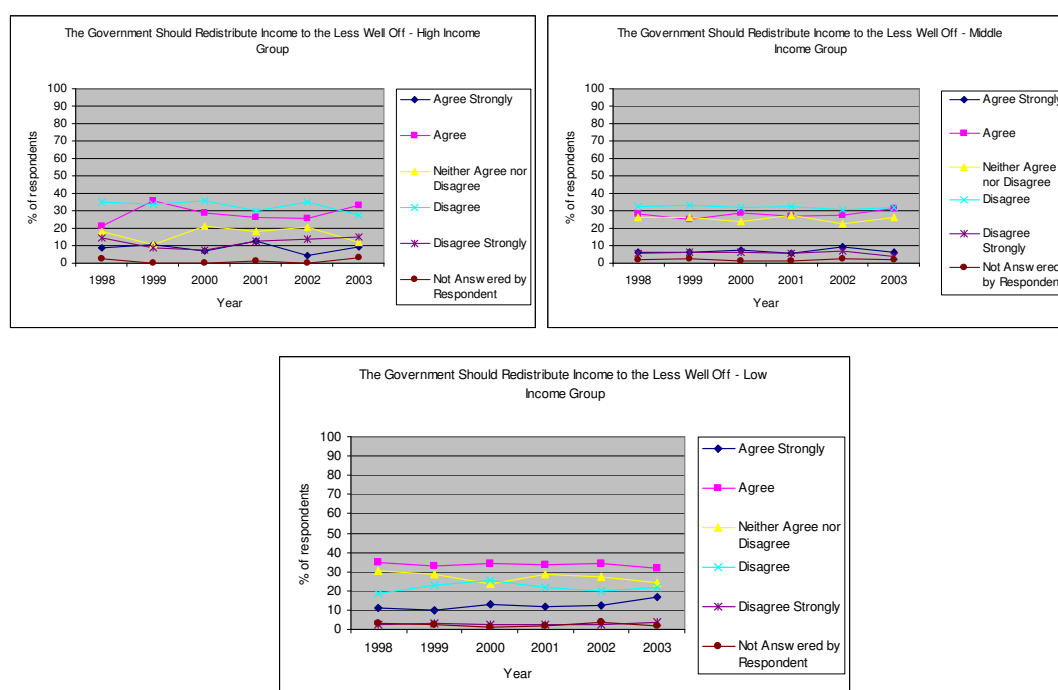


Figure 9: “The Government should redistribute income to the less well off (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

Attitudes to the role of government in redistribution are much less uniform and can be seen to reflect the social class divide; however in each of the social classes the numbers of respondents who ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ are very similar suggesting that this is a contentious issue. Analysis of the high income respondent group reflects the theory of status maintenance, with generally over 30% of respondents disagreeing with redistribution by government, however it can be seen that over the period 1998-2003 between 20% and 30% of respondents actually agreed with redistribution; it could, with further research, be examined whether a change in government ideology has had an effect of influencing personal principles. The fluctuation in attitudes poses a

dilemma for the year 2003; where the percentage of respondents who agreed with government redistribution overtook those who were against. This may be simply a blip.

Views held by those of the middle income group can be seen to be much more consistent and polarised, with little fluctuation. As with the high income respondents, there is predominant support against governmental redistribution, constantly over the 30% mark; however a gradual rise in support can be seen from 1999, potentially as a result of government ideology causing a re-evaluation of personal beliefs.

It is amongst the low income group that the trend is reversed, there is majority support for governmental redistribution to the less well off; although this is unsurprising considering that this is the target group. Support for redistribution can be seen to be constantly over 30% for those who 'agree' but also worth noting is the significant percentage of respondents who 'agree strongly' that the government should redistribute income to them; rising from just over 10% in 1998 to over 15% in 2003. This supports the theory of 'status aspiration'.

What the data says- on Benefits (broken down by social class)

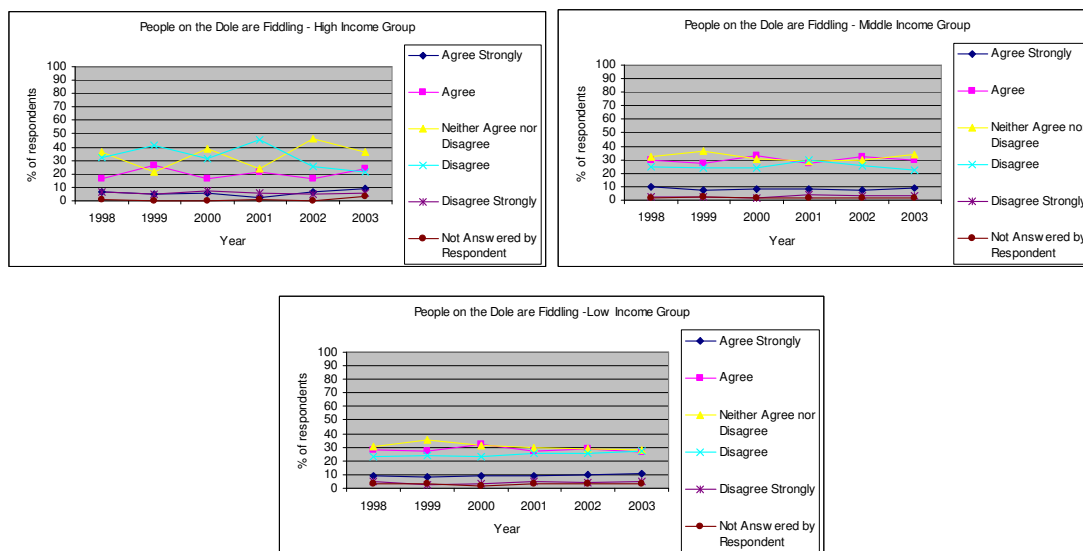


Figure 10: "People on the Dole are fiddling" (Data from BSA 1998-2003)

Respondents in the high income group seem to agree to an extent that benefit claimants are cheating the system; there is a period trend around the 30% mark of those who 'agree'. Whilst percentages of those who 'disagree' or 'neither agree or disagree' with the statement are subject

to wild fluctuations. Examining the trends between 1998 and 2003 it can be seen that increases in support for one of these options has a corresponding decreasing effect on the other. This implies that those who ‘disagree’ are not of the same level of conviction as those who ‘agree’, in some years preferring to remain neutral rather than give a definitive polarised answer. There are many potential reasons for this, such as influences from newspaper and news reports highlighting such instances of benefit fraud.

The survey results obtained for the middle income group reflect a series of much more consistent attitudes; demonstrated by a roughly three-way spilt between those who ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ and ‘neither’. Such a three-way spilt can also be seen in the results from the low income group; however in this case the margin of difference has declined over the period. Whilst there is an almost equal spilt, longitudinal analysis shows that the numbers of respondents who ‘disagree’ has been slowly rising at the expense of those who ‘agree’. One explanation for this is the tightening of benefit conditions as shown in the welfare-to-work strategy and other welfare policy. Essentially the opportunities to ‘fiddle’ have been reduced and therefore the numbers have also reduced. A situation which may be more apparent to those with more exposure to the benefit system, namely those in the low income group, and therefore this can partially explain the differences amongst the different social classes.

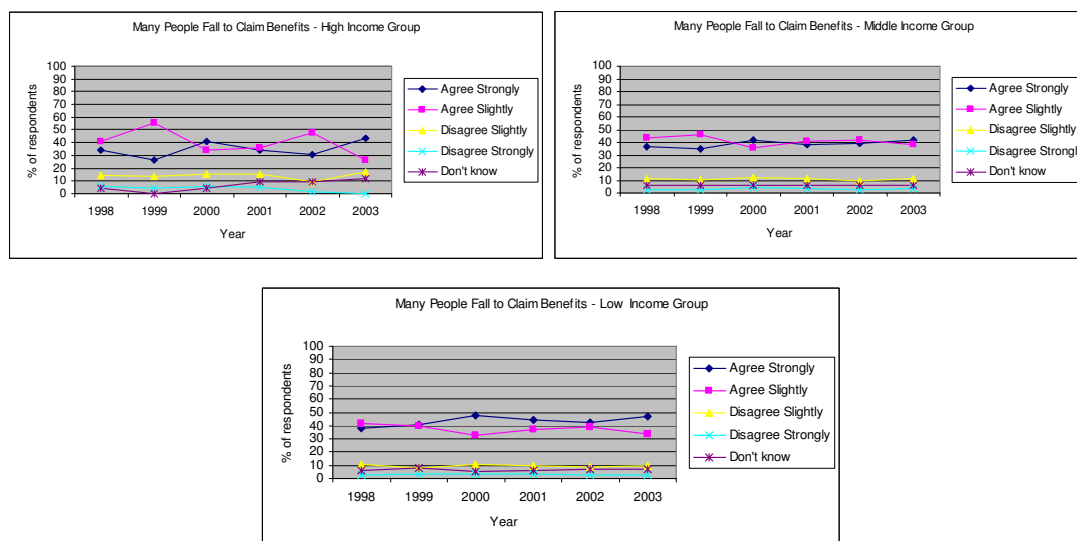


Figure 11: “Many People Fail to Claim Benefits” (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

There is little variation between the income groups for this question with clear majorities seen to ‘agree’ or ‘agree strongly’ that many people fail to claim benefits. Slight increases can be seen the overall numbers when descending the social groups with average support for these two positions topping 70% for the high income group, rising to 80% in the middle group and slightly about 80% in the low income group. This can once again be partially explained through the increasing levels of exposure to the benefits system witnessed by those in the lower socio-economic groups. In this instance, the attitudinal data is reflective more of knowledge than of the principles held by individuals.

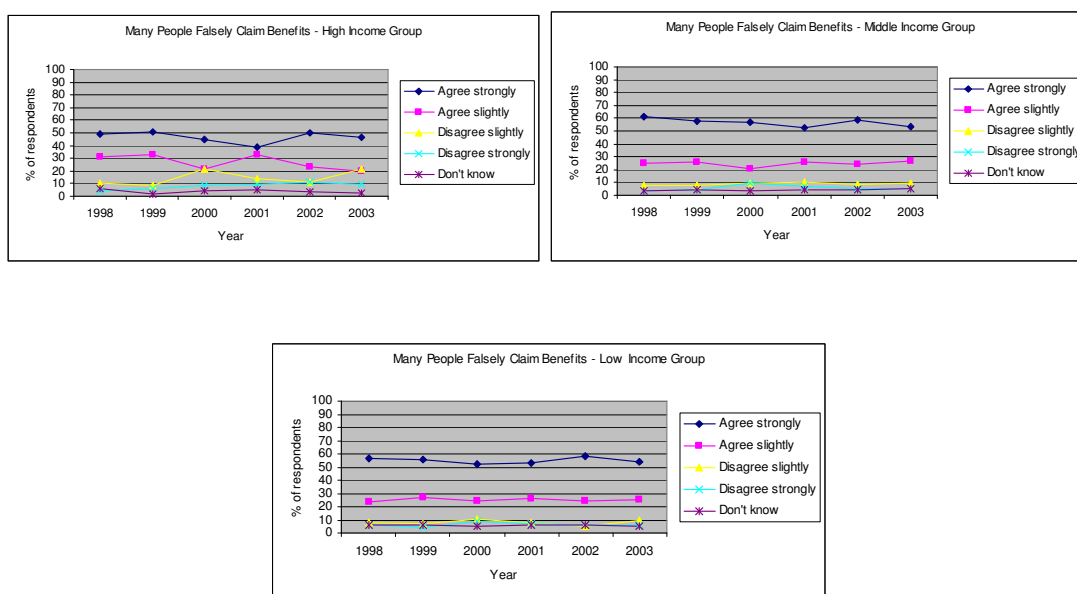


Figure 12: “Many People Falsely Claim Benefits” (Data taken from BSA 1998-2003)

Across all three social groups it can be seen that around 80% of respondents either ‘agree slightly’ or ‘agree strongly’ with the statement; with the only variation being to the extent of the agreement. It can be seen that in the high income group there is greater support for ‘agree slightly’ than any other group whilst ‘agree strongly’ is the lowest. However since 2001 there has been increasing divergence with more respondents agreeing strongly than slightly.

The opposite can be seen in the middle income group with the numbers who ‘agree strongly’ reducing whilst the proportion of respondents who ‘agree slightly’ has increased accordingly. The data obtained from the low income group is almost identical to that of the middle group.

What the data says – on Unemployment (broken down by social class)

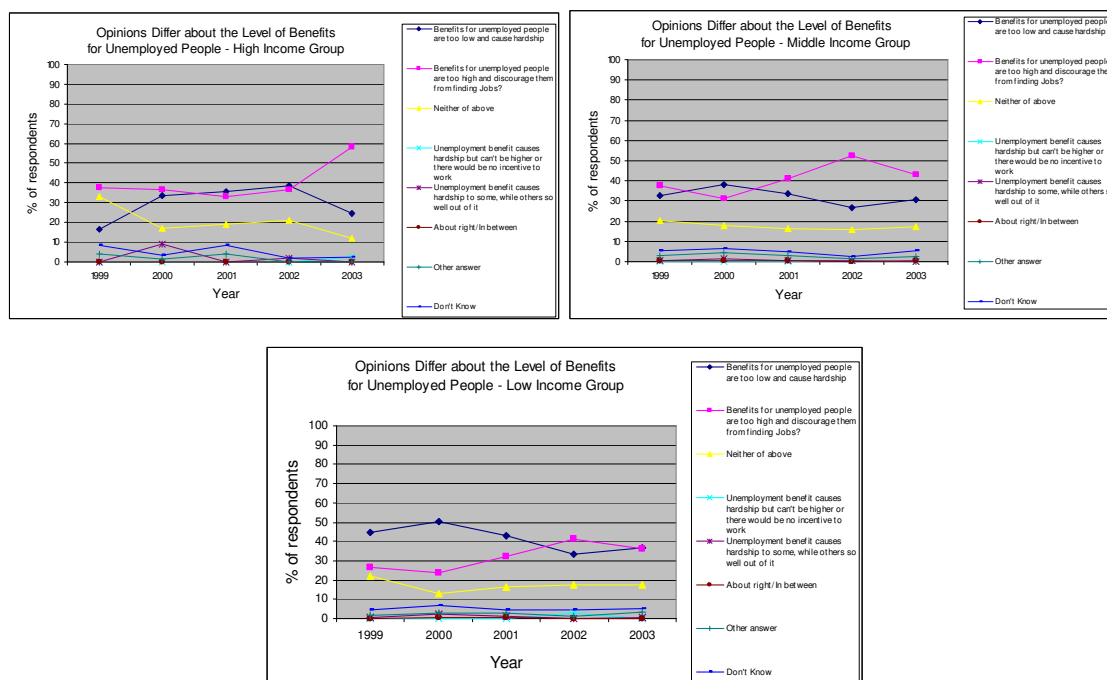


Figure 13: “Opinions differ about the level of benefits to unemployed people” (Data taken from BSA/SSAS 1999-2003)

Examining the responses of the high income group it can be seen that there is a steady rise in the view that benefits are too high and thus create the ‘perverse incentives’ not to find work. This is an interesting point as the data continues to show a rise despite efforts by the government to introduce more stringent conditions on benefit eligibility; however the existence of such a sharp rise in 2003 in the high income group and sharp fall in support for this view in the middle income group presents an analytical dilemma. Unfortunately at the time of writing, data for years 2004 and 2005 were unavailable and therefore it is difficult to tell if the results for 2003 were an anomaly or the start of a change in trend. In keeping with trends already seen in previous figures, the view that benefits are too high is significantly lower in the low income group, although the rises seen between 2000 and 2002 (with the exception of 2003) – in addition to the falls seen in support for the view that benefits are too low – could support Mau’s ‘reciprocity’ explanation in that these respondents may have some connection to the New Deal schemes or other return to work programs and as such will be re-entering the labour force (and potentially migrating to the middle income group).

An analysis of the data shows that preferences for redistribution and redistributive principles are weakest in the 'high' income groups and strongest in the 'low' income groups. It has been suggested that these attitudes are borne out of self-interest in the form of status maintenance and status aspiration. However, Svallfors (1993: 268) argues; "perceptions and attitudes are not formed as calculated responses to economic realities and self-interest. The process of attitude formation is a much more complex one, where frameworks of interpretation and ideological commitments tend to blur the impact of raw self-interest".

This can be seen in the changes in attitudes over the period 1998-2003, the first and second Labour administrations, wherein the two polar opposite social groups have inherited certain elements of the other; the high income group has been seen to become more supportive of redistribution, with an increased overall belief that the income gap is too large and that the government should redistribute income to the less well off. The latter is significant since it is this group from which the money will be redistributed from; something unthinkable under Thatcherism. However an increased view that those on benefits are 'fiddling' suggests that, despite a rise in the number of benefits available and in the ideological context of redistribution, there still exists a view that entitlement and desert are still very much conceptions of social justice held by the higher class.

On the other hand the low income group has seen a shift towards a more entitlement and desert conception of social justice; with more respondents disagreeing that the government should redistribute income to them and with the increasing belief that many people fail to claim the benefits on offer to them. This suggests that there is more than monetary concerns to individuals, it could be conferred that the extension of means-testing and qualifying conditions for benefits has led many people to not claim them. Submitting to a means-test requires an individual to admit that they are poor or of a lower social status than others; this is of particularly applicable to the UK as social class plays a prominent role in society. This can also be seen through the support and evidence in favour of the link between low social class and status aspiration; however it does appear that there are limits to which an individual will go to in order to improve their social status, in fact it is suggested that "stigma all too often exacerbates the impact of poverty on their vulnerable lives" (McMahon and Marsh, 1999)

Chapter 10 - A Comparison between Government Policy and Public Attitudes in relation to
Redistributive Social Justice Principles

The use of the Welfare-to-Work strategy as an indicator of principles of social justice in government policy is effective as it covers the necessary three elements for comparison: redistribution, benefits, and unemployment. These three elements could also be found in public attitude survey data and as a result a fruitful study was possible.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, Tax Credits and the New Deal programmes represent the embodiment of redistributive social justice; both being targeted at the ‘less well off’ (though what this actually means is a subjective concept: much like social justice) and aiming to have an equalizing effect on the social class divide. This attempt to level the income gap comes in two forms: Tax Credits offer direct financial redistribution whilst the New Deal programme offers a redistribution of resources from rich to poor in order to enable the less well off to gain the necessary skills to (re)enter the labour market.

Analysis of Tax Credits and the New Deal programme revealed that many different principles of social justice could be seen; something which Esping-Anderson (2005: 8) refers to as a ‘hodgepodge’. The principle of equality can be seen in the motives of the Welfare-to-Work strategy through the singling out of the lower income group as the main beneficiary – “the biggest gains have gone to families with children, single-pensioners and low waged families” (Taylor-Gooby, 2001: 160) – funded through redistribution from the middle and high income groups by way of taxation. However the existence of qualifying conditions and means-testing also demonstrates the principles of entitlement and desert; entitlement can be seen through individuals meeting the conditions of the schemes and desert can be seen through certain tax credits representing a reward for returning to work.

Identified Principles of Social Justice
<i>Government Policy</i>
Equality
Entitlement
Desert

Figure 14: Principles of social justice in Government Policy

How does this compare with principles of social justice identified in public attitudinal data?

It was hypothesised that the concepts of status maintenance and status aspiration, as outlined by Corneo and Gruner and supported by Hochschild, would play a significant role in class-based attitudes to the three identifier elements of redistribution, benefits, and unemployment. The hypotheses stood as 'high and middle income individuals will reflect individualistic principles of social justice with lower redistribution, such as entitlement or desert; whilst the less well off should be seen to more vigorously support principle of redistributive social justice that favour equalisation'.

On the first test – redistribution – there can be seen to a greater acknowledgement amongst the low income group (80%) than in the high income group (60%) that the income gap between rich and poor is too large. This is an important point as even though both groups overwhelmingly accept the excess of the income gap; the responses when posed the question should the government redistribute to the low income group vary significantly. Supporting the hypothesis above and the ideas put forward by Corneo and Gruner, it was seen that there was more qualified support for redistribution from the low income group than the high income group. From this it could be inferred that the high income group has greater identification with the principle of entitlement rather than equality, whilst the low income group can be seen to favour equality.

When looking at the second element for comparison – benefits – there was little variation between the income groups; all three income groups felt, by large majority, that many people did not claim all the benefits they were entitled to. Those who 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' stood at 70% for the high income group, rising to 80% in the middle group and slightly about 80% in the low income group; it could be suggested that these results are influenced more by socio-economic factors such as stigma and/or exposure to the benefits system rather than principles of social justice. However this data and its slight variations become more relevant when looking at issues of trust. Data on falsely claiming benefits or 'fiddling' shows that there is greater acceptance and acknowledgement of these practices amongst the low income group when compared to the high income group. This can be explained through the previously mentioned socio-economic reasons but also it could be argued that those in the low income group are more willing to 'fiddle' as the equalising outcome is in line with their preferred principle of social justice; in contrast those in the high income group are more reluctant as they may feel they are not deserving of such benefits.

On unemployment, the same trends of preferred principles can be noted. The high income group is the biggest supporter of the view that unemployment benefit is too high, in keeping with entitlement and desert principles; whilst the low income group are less supportive of this view thus favouring the principle of equality.

Identified Principles of Social Justice	
<i>Government Policy</i>	<i>Public Attitudes</i>
Equality	Equality (low income group)
Entitlement	Entitlement (high/middle ¹⁴ income group)
Desert	Desert (high/middle ¹⁵ income group)

Figure 15: A comparison of principles found in Government policy and public attitudes.

When comparing the two sets of identified principles it can be seen that there is an almost perfect match; with the principles of social justice discovered in public attitudes mirroring those principles found in the selected government policy. This can be seen to answer the question of whether or not government policy is representative of the citizenry; it is, but for different reasons for different people.

¹⁴ Though to a lesser extent than the high income group

¹⁵ Though to a lesser extent than the high income group

Conclusion

It has been seen that there is rough match of principles of social justice when comparing government policy and public attitudes. The only difference that can be seen is that whilst government policy has elements of three principles, the effect of social class can be seen to have a divisive effect of the attitudes of the public; with equality – status aspiration – being the preferring option for the low income group and a mixture of entitlement and desert – status maintenance – being observed in the high income group (and to a lesser extent the middle income group).

Whilst government policy has been shown to favour the less well off (read: low income group), the survey data has shown that even amongst the high and middle income groups there is still support for these policy initiatives. This can be explained by theorising on the effects of the policy successfully achieving its aims; both Tax Credits and the New Deal programme aim to return individuals into work and off benefits. This will have the effect of reducing the level of expenditure spent on benefits and it is conceivable that this could result in either tax cuts – a favourite of the more right-wing – or increased investment in other public services in which the high and middle income groups would benefit, such as education or health.

As figure 15 has shown, the principles of social justice found in government policy may be identical to those found in analysis of public attitudes. However when broken down by social class it is not as clear cut, with different social classes supporting certain principles over others. At this point it is worth restating Esping-Anderson's (2005: 8) comment that "everyday politics usually represent a hodgepodge of principles of justice".

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